

2.8 Feel-Good Reads for Self-Isolation

Angourie (host)

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land upon which this work was developed and is presented. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello everyone and welcome back to The Community Library. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

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Angourie (host)

As I'm sure you've noticed, I have been absent from the podcast for a while. I initially took a break over Christmas and New Year's while I spent time in Australia with my family, um, but then I decided to extend that break because I went back to work and I was really busy. In light of recent events, however, um, my work has, like so many other jobs, ah, been shut down and postponed for the time being. So, I was working in America, and I flew back to Australia just before they implemented stronger travel restrictions. So, I made it home, and as per the Australian government's new restrictions and requirements, I am now self-quarantining for fourteen days.

So, I thought, what better time than to start up the podcast again? I literally have nothing else on my agenda, like most of you, I think. So today I'm bringing you a very special COVID-19-pandemic-self-isolation-self-quarantine episode. I'm going to be recommending some feel-good reads that will hopefully help you stay calm and also occupied while you're all staying at home going stir crazy.

But, before I get into specific recommendations, I want to talk about what I'm currently reading. So at the moment, I am reading three books. I am reading *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J. K. Rowling, again. Um, this is kind of part of my feel-good reads, ah, "moment", I guess. This book always makes me feel happy, so I'm rereading it. I'm also reading *The Last Olympian* by Rick Riordan. This is the fifth book in the *Percy Jackson* series. I did an episode on the first book in the series and also the first movie. Kind of a while back, with my friend Harry, so I will link those in the show notes if you want to check them out. Um, but I have continued reading them, um, and now I'm on to the last one and it's getting exciting! I hope they're gonna win the war! Finally, I am reading *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows. That is a mouthful. This book is about a young woman who starts writing letters to someone who lives in Guernsey, and it's set just after World War II. It was made into a Netflix film with, ah, Lily James, I believe, just, like, a few years ago. And this book, I – I got it for my birthday this year. Um, and my friends and I are reading it in our book club. So, originally we were choosing one book each month, um, but because of the COVID pandemic, um, we are flying through the books, and we are holding our book club much more frequently than, um, once every month. So, this is our next read, um, and I'm really liking it so far. I'm only twenty pages in, but it's just really warm and light-hearted and wonderful, so I'm excited to read that.

So, let's get into some feel-good reads that will make you feel happy during these trying times. I've kind of separated these off into categories. And this is obviously just what works for me and what makes me feel happy and safe and cosy, so it might be different for you. But, my first category is childhood favourites. And I've kind of put this into a subcategory of childhood favourite series. Because I think that when we were kids, I mean, there were so many fantasy series that we loved. For me it was *Harry Potter*, which is why I'm reading it again. But for a lot of people it was *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer, the *Mortal Instruments Series* by Cassandra Clare, the *Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan, *Lord of the Rings* [by] J. R. R. Tolkien, the *Eragon* series is one that a lot of people loved, that's by Christopher Paolini.

But one series that I want to highlight that I loved as a kid that I don't think many people have read is the *Inkheart* trilogy by Cornelia Funke. So this is a fantasy trilogy, and the first book is called *Inkheart*, the second one is called *Inkspell*, and the third one is called *Inkdeath*. And I'm doing a reread of them, um, and I'm just about to start *Inkdeath*, ah, which is the last one in the series. And this series is about a young girl called Meggie, and in the first book she discovers that her father has the power to read people and objects out of books into the real world. So when he reads out loud, he can make the things that he's reading about come to life in the real world. And, of course that has so many consequences, and it's just – it's a book about magic and fairies and story-telling, really. It's like – it's a bookworm's perfect fantasy novel. And when I was a kid I *loved* this series so much. I liked the second one more than the first one, strangely, um, so if you read the first one and you love it, then I – I highly recommend picking up the rest of the series.

There are some other childhood favourites that I wanna talk about. Um, I was a huge fan of Enid Blyton growing up. Maybe if you're American you don't know Enid Blyton as much, but Enid Blyton was a British author, and she was a very prolific writer. Um, she wrote kind of in the 40s, 50s, and 60s. Ah, she wrote *The Magic Faraway Tree*, um, she wrote that series. And that's about three kids who move to a little cottage on the edge of a wood, and they discover a magical tree. And this tree has lots of fairy folk living in it, and it leads – like, the very top of the tree leads to a new land, like, every week or so. So when they visit, they visit, like, Topsy-Turvy Land, and the Land of Take-What-You-Want, and Birthday Land, and it's just, like, the sweetest, most heart-warming adventure novel. And each chapter is like a little fable, you know? They go to this land, and they learn an important lesson and then they come home with, you know, magic fairy dust, or magic fairy toffee, and it's just, like, it's so sweet and cute. It's – I mean, it's a kids' book, but, like, if you're like me, reading that will make you feel cosy and adorable and, just, wonderful.

Another Enid Blyton series that I loved when I was a kid was the *Famous Five* series. And this is a bit of a longer series – I think there are lots of books in this series. Um, but this is about three siblings who visit their cousin who lives at the seaside, um, and they visit their cousin every summer holidays. And they discover that their cousin has a little island off the coast of where she lives, and the island is called Kirrin Island. They visit Kirrin Island and there are lots of mysteries and adventures linked to Kirrin Island. And the four cousins and the dog make the mystery-solving Famous Five. Um, it's really cute, it's just – ah – it's adorable. I should definitely reread that.

Another one that's very popular that many people love is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Ah, this is a very escapist novel. And I think – if you've only seen the Disney movie, or, like, the new Disney movie that they also came out with, it's actually quite different to the book. Um, the book is kind of ... more of like a ... like, a fever dream, rather than, like, this magical fantasy

fairy land. Like, it's weird and whacky. But it's really cool escapist fiction. Also, it's not too hard to get into because a lot of people know the set-up, you know: Alice falls down a rabbit hole and she's in this magical land. So if you haven't read it, um, and you're looking for something that's kind of a bit escapist, then I think it's a really interesting classic to pick up, because you can see how it influenced the Disney version of it, but it's actually really, ah, different, and um, weird. It's just weird.

Another classic favourite that's kind of a children's book that has gotten a lot more traction, I think, since the Netflix TV show came out is *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery. This is a classic Canadian children's book, and it's about Anne Shirley, and she's an orphan, and she's sent to live with a brother and sister on a farm on Prince Edward Island, which is in Canada. And she gets into all sorts of trouble. She's got bright red hair and freckles, and a big heart and a wild spirit, and she just – she gets herself into mischief. Um, if you like the show, then I would highly, highly recommend the book. Um, I loved the book as a kid, and this is also a series, actually. This series follows her all the way through to adulthood. Um, but yeah, I would highly recommend *Anne of Green Gables*. It's very escapist, very cosy and wonderful and, just, cute.

Kind of in a similar vein, these are ones that I just want to mention quickly, and ones that might only be good if they're nostalgic, 'cause I haven't reread these in a while. Things like *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri, um, *The Secret Garden* and *The Little Princess*, which are both by Frances Hodgson Burnett. These three are ones that I read when I was a kid, and I haven't reread since, but they're very sweet, and ... I don't know, maybe if you want some of that childhood nostalgia, you can read those.

An author whose work really holds up – I say this like it's ... like I'm saying some controversial thing here, but I'm not, everyone knows that this author is brilliant – ah, Roald Dahl. His works are quite amazing to read as an adult. He writes so cleverly about children and adults and how these dynamics play between children and adults, and how adults should be more like children. Um, and I think his works are very escapist. And, even if you read them as an adult, you can really appreciate them, and you can kind of, um, tap into a more childlike version of yourself, I think. At least, that's how I feel when I read them. Three of my favourite Roald Dahl books growing up were *The Twits*, *The Witches*, and *Matilda*. Everyone knows and loves *Matilda*, I think a lot of people have also read *The Witches*, but *The Twits* is one that not many people know about, and it's a really weird one. It's very short. It's about Mr and Mrs Twit, and they're horrible people, they're evil, and they capture birds and monkeys and they keep them in cages. And of course the animals that they keep in cages can talk. And one day they decide to take revenge on the Twits, and they play all of these awful pranks on them. And it's just, like – it's such a whacky story, um, but, you know, a lot of interesting things are brought up. Like, what it means to be good, what it means to be bad; revenge, and if revenge is justified. Like, it's just – Roald Dahl writes really clever children's books, so if you read Roald Dahl as a kid, but you haven't reread them, I think now would be a great time to, like, reread them, 'cause it's really interesting.

Now for some more adult titles that are kind of classics. Um, what I've been talking about has all been childhood favourites that you're probably rereading that you read when you were a kid. But these ones, if you haven't read them before, they're also just great books to read. And very escapist, and, you know, have happy endings, and good to read in this, um – in these scary and uncertain times. So the first one that I have to mention, of course, is *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane

Austen. This is just ... there's a reason why everyone loves it, okay, there's a reason why this is one of the best classics of all time. It's a classic hate-to-love romance. If you read modern romances, and you like the hate-to-love trope, this book did it first! So, it's just brilliant, I love it, I love it every single time I read it. Every time I read it I find something new to enjoy about it. There's a lot of witty social commentary in it, and it's just – it's just brilliant.

Another classic that I have talked about on this podcast before, I think, is *Far From the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy. This is also a very classic romance that involves a love ... square? A love-fork? I don't know! It's – it's three men in love with one woman. The woman's name is Bathsheba Everdene, which is just, like, the best name ever. And she takes up a position as a farmer on a large property. And of course that was, like, scandalous for the time, it was like: "Woah, a woman running a farm, how dare she!" So she runs this farm, and she catches the eye of three eligible bachelors. You've got a respectable gentleman, a seductive soldier, and a kindly shepherd. And the big question on everyone's mind is: Who does she end up with? Read the book to find out.

Another book that's a classic, um, that I've spoken about a lot on this podcast 'cause I loved it so much is *The Enchanted April* by Elizabeth von Arnim. And this is a novel that not many people have read, I don't think, um, and it's also a very escapist novel. It's set in the south of Italy in the spring. I know maybe some people don't want to read books set in Italy right now, but it's just got a beautiful setting, and very escapist and magical. And it's about four women who rent a holiday house in the south of Italy, and they're all changed by the experience. And it's kind of about friendships between women, and connecting to nature, and, yeah, it's just – it's a wonderful book and I highly recommend it, and I can't believe that more people haven't read it, you know?

In a similar vein to *The Enchanted April*, is *A Room With a View* by E. M. Forster. Ah, this is also set in Italy, this one's set in Florence. And it's about a young woman who accompanies her cousin on a holiday to Florence and she meets a dashing young gentleman her own age. But, obviously, complications arise, and it's – it's kind of a romance, um, but it's also just a classic, and beautiful setting. The first half is set in Florence and then the second half is set back in England. And it's just very cosy and heart-warming, and of course it has a happy ending.

Finally, in this category, I wanna talk about one of my favourite classics of all time, and that is *Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith. So this is set in 1930s England, and this is about a young girl who lives with her vain sister and her very kooky father in a crumbling castle. And they're very poor, and all they have left is this – is this castle that's falling apart. But one day, two young American men come to claim the castle as their property. And so of course drama ensues, romance ensues, um, and it's all told from the perspective of this young fifteen-year-old girl. And it's her diary, um, so you're reading her diary. And it's just – it's so magical, and just transports you to this crumbling castle in England on the moors and it's – yeah, it's wonderful.

Next I wanna recommend some newer titles that are feel-good and heart-warming and also quite escapist. The first one that I want to recommend is – I mean, it's a bit of self-promo! It's *There Was Still Love* by Favel Parrett. This is an Australian book, and I actually narrated the audiobook for this novel. I loved the experience, it was just so wonderful to connect with a book in that way. So, if you want to hear me read out this book, um, then you can find it online. I do really love this book and I highly recommend it. I don't really wanna tell you the premise 'cause it's very intricate and delicate, and it's such a short book and I don't – I don't really wanna spoil it. But, it's just – I can tell you what

it's about. It's about family ties, homesickness, um, it's about story-telling, intergenerational love, and sisters, and family, and it's set both in Prague and in Melbourne in the 80s. And, if you want to hear me read it, then, um, I'll leave a link in the show notes to where you can rent or purchase the audiobook.

Next up, I wanna recommend a book that everyone in the book community knows and loves, and that is *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell. And I wanted to include this on this list because it's actually – it's a book about escapism. Um, so, if you don't know what it's about, it's about this girl called Cath, and she is going to college with her twin sister, Wren. And they are both huge fans of this book and movie series called *Simon Snow*. And though it's never mentioned in the book, *Simon Snow* is obviously a version of *Harry Potter*. Um, and Cath is the author of a very successful fanfiction about *Simon Snow*. But when they go to college, Wren wants to distance herself from the fandom, and wants to kind of branch out on her own, and then Cath finds herself struggling with her identity and who she wants to be in college. Um, I really liked this when I read it. It was just fun and fluffy, and there was romance, and there was a lot of commentary on fan culture, as well. And I think it would be really interesting to read at this time because it's an escapist book about escapism.

Another book that I want to recommend that I feel like everyone knows about or has read at some point is *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid. I think this one paints such a vivid portrait of, um, 1950s / 1960s Hollywood, so it's also great escapist fiction. Um, it's about a fictional Hollywood film star icon called Evelyn Hugo, and she rose to fame in the late 40s, early 50s, and it's just about her life and her seven husbands. And I read this book, I think, in a day, maybe two days? It's one that you can just fly through, and it hooks you in and you just go on this adventure, and you are just completely immersed in the world of, ah, 1950s Hollywood, which I loved. Another novel of Taylor Jenkins Reid that many people loved, ah, last year, was *Daisy Jones & The Six*. I read that one ... I didn't love it, actually. I – I liked it less than *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. But if you're not into 1950s Hollywood, *Daisy Jones & The Six* is about 1970s rock n roll. And it's set in L. A. and it's about a band who rises to fame in the 70s. And I like that setting less than Hollywood in the 50s. So, I don't know, pick whichever one is more interesting to you, but I think both of them immerse you in the world that they create.

Finally, I wanna recommend a book that I loved as a teenager – I mean, I still am a teenager, but you know, when I was a tween, I guess – um, and that is *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* by Louise Rennison. This is also a series, um, so I guess this could also go in the childhood nostalgia, um, section as well. But, if you haven't read it, I do highly recommend it because it's hilarious and brilliant. It's about Georgia Nicolson; a teenager going to high school in England, um, and it's also told in a diary format, so we're reading her diary, basically. And we follow her, just, kind of, dealing with best friends, and boys, and false-eyelashes, and first kisses, and it's just funny and cute. I have an omnibus edition, so it's got the first four books in one big volume, so I might actually pick them up and reread them. But I think there are something like ten books in the series? They also made it into a film a while back, it might be on Netflix or something, but it's a really cute film, as well, if you're interested.

Something else I wanted to include in this episode is resources on how to get books remotely. So there are a few ways you can do this. One thing that I think is really important to do right now is to support your favourite independent bookshops. So if you look up your favourite independent bookshop, most likely they will be shipping books out to people right now, so, um, if you wanna

support your indie bookstores, that is a great way to do it. There are also some great online second-hand bookshops. Two that I use are World of Books and ThriftBooks. And the reason I use these over Amazon or Book Depository or Book Outlet is that these two websites are second-hand books. So, they are used, they might be a little beaten up, but they're often cheaper. Also, you know, it's helping the environment, it's giving a book a new home. So, that's why I use World of Books and ThriftBooks.

In terms of getting books for free, there are so many ways to do that. Um, I love the library, but unfortunately my local library has shut down. The great thing is that libraries now have a huge, extensive online catalogue. I am currently a member of two libraries: I'm a member of a library in Australia, and a member of a library in America. And both of those libraries use different apps so that you can access their online catalogue. At the moment my Australian library uses BorrowBox and cloudLibrary, and I've just connected my library card to these apps and then it shows me what's available at my library. And my American library that I'm a part of uses Libby, and that is also just an app that you download and you connect to your library card and it shows you what's available at your library. If you are not already part of a library, look up your local library, no matter if they're shut down or not, their website will still be up and running. And most likely you will be able to get an online library card. And that means that you won't have a physical card, 'cause obviously you won't go in and get the physical card, but you will be able to access their online resources. If you're not sure which apps to use in tandem with your library, go on to their website and look through their catalogue, um, and it will tell you if something is available as an ebook or an audiobook, and most likely it will tell you how you can access that, what apps that you can use in tandem with your library card. It might take a bit of researching and a bit of fiddling around to figure out, ah, how it all works, but trust me, it is so worth it. I am able to access hundreds of titles for free from my bedroom without leaving here. So, I do highly, highly, recommend that.

Also, if you can't get access to a library or use those apps, there are other apps where you can access audiobooks and ebooks. A huge one that everyone knows about – that everyone uses – is Audible. You can get a 30-day free trial, um, just sign up with your email. I think also maybe they are making it free for 30 days, just for anyone, um, in light of the circumstances. I know that Scribd, which is another one that I use, has definitely done that. So Scribd is very similar to Audible, except you get both ebooks and audiobooks. I have a 30-day free trial on Scribd, but I just saw an announcement they made saying that their service is free for the next 30 days for anyone. You don't have to attach a credit card, you don't have to sign up, it is just completely free in light of the circumstances. So, take advantage of that resource while you can. Another way to access ebooks for free is that many authors have made their books free to borrow on Amazon / Kindle. I'm not sure which authors exactly, I have just seen some screenshots floating around of different books that are available for free on Kindle. So, if you have Amazon / Kindle then, um, have a look at what books are free or highly discounted at this time.

Finally, for those of you who don't want to read calming books in this time, and who actually want to kind of lean into this, kind of, hysteria and anxiousness, I will also leave a link to a video in the show notes, um, from one of my favourite YouTubers. And it's a recommendations video all about books about pandemics and apocalyptic fiction and all of that jazz. So, if you're interested, that will be in the show notes.

But that it's it for my recommendations. I hope that you find something in there that you would like to read that makes you feel happy and content and not stressed. Ah, if you have any recommendations then don't hesitate to DM The Community Library on Instagram, or tweet me @angourierice, and I will retweet you or post your recommendations on my story, or whatever. Yeah, this is a very stressful time and I think it's important that we all support each other, because for a lot of people, self-isolation is really hard and really lonely. And, um, I think it's important to connect with story-telling at this time. You know, if you're self-isolating by yourself and not with other people, then it's important to stay connected to the world through stories, and one of the ways to do that is through books. So, I hope that you are all out there staying safe, washing your hands, self-isolating, and also reading.

Thank you very much for listening. The podcast will be continuing business as usual with uploads every Sunday, and I'm also going to not make all of the episodes pandemic-themed or related. I think it's important to talk about things other than the news right now, so you can look forward to some more calming and hopefully interesting book-related content.

[theme music]

If you enjoyed this, you can subscribe on iTunes so that you never miss an episode. You can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the_community_library, and you can also use the hashtag #thecomcommunitylibrary on Instagram and Twitter. I also run a blog, which is angourieslibrary.wordpress.com, and there you will find full transcriptions of the episodes, extra resources and notes on the episodes. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com, that's dash the symbol. Once again, thank you very much for listening, and I will talk to you next week. Bye!

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